

# Anthropology Lab 2470-01

**Bonni Bruce**

*The wind swept through the valley as winter slowly approached. She covered her small child the best she could as her people struggled to get to Mummy Cave, their winter home west of the Pryor Mountains. They had been travelling for many days to get there before the first snows. Her husband, a hunter for the people, told her in two more sunsets they'll stop for winter. She sighs with relief and picks up a few small stones that lie in their path. She is clearing the way for the travois. She throws the stones in piles that lie on either side of the path. It has been done this way on this same path by her ancestors, and it will be done on this same path by her children. This is the path that also will take them back to the Pryor Mountains for the summer. The sun slowly sinks beyond the horizon. The band leaders signal to stop and make camp for the night.*

*After the snow receded and the ice melted, she was once again on her ancestors' trail. They left their well-protected winter site, disbanded, and moved to hunt and to collect edible plants. Her son was able to walk now. This made it easier since she didn't have to carry him as much anymore. Her job now was to collect bitterroot along the limestone ridges and sego lilies in the sandstone and grasslands. The days were getting longer as the people, calling themselves Apsaalooke or children of the large-beaked bird, migrated toward the tops of the Pryors. By June and through August the mountain tops would lose their snow cover. This is where they will dwell in the summer, among the mountain tops.*

*The alpine forests and meadows are ideal for hunting and gathering. This year, she felt, would be especially favorable. The snows were heavy, indicating a much moister climate than years before. She looked forward to the lush vegetation and plentiful herds of bison, mule deer, antelope, and bighorn sheep. With these moments the life cycle continued.*

**T**he hardships of Native Americans on the Bad Pass Trail through the Bighorn Canyon/Pryor Mountains region is one of the many topics I discovered in a unique class at Northwest College, a community college located in Powell, WY. The class, through the combined efforts of anthropology instructor Doug Nelson and park curator Jon G. James of Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area (BICA), offers students a chance to handle archeological materials from excavations conducted in Bighorn Canyon NRA during the 1970s and '80s.

What intrigued me most about the class is that it is offered as an anthropology laboratory internship using current professional museum curatorial practices and policies followed by the National Park Service. Since archeology is my major field of study, I jumped at the chance to actually gain lab credit hours and volunteer NPS work experience as an undergraduate at a two-

Anthropology Internship 2470-01 is designed as a hands-on laboratory project working with approximately 3,600 archeological items from the museum collection of the National Park Service, Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area.

With the personal guidance and assistance of the park curator and a college instructor, course participants will transfer archeological material from 43 metal ammunition boxes to chemically inert polyethylene bags and curatorial storage boxes, then relabel these bags and boxes with accurate archeological site provenience and new NPS catalog numbers.

It is estimated that it will take approximately two to three semesters to finish the project. Students participating in the course will earn one laboratory credit hour from Northwest College and be signed on as a Volunteer-In-Park (VIP) for Bighorn Canyon NRA. Curatorial supplies and materials will be provided by the National Park Service.

The park curator will provide students an orientation to NPS museum collection policy, the BICA archeological surveys and collection, and to the work requirements of the project during several one hour classroom lectures and discussions. Following this introduction, one hour lab sessions will be held at least once every week during the semester.

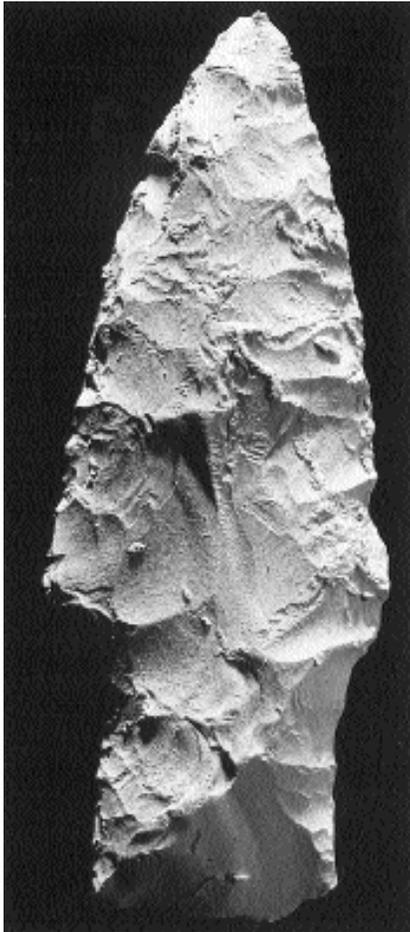
year community college in northwestern Wyoming. (Opportunities like this don't come every day!)

I've always been excited about the past, especially Wyoming's past. I've always wondered, what went on here? What happened, before settlers arrived and before the westward movement?

Lawrence L. Loendorf, Ph.D., presently at the University of Arizona, was the professional archeologist supervising the Bighorn Canyon NRA/Pryor Mountains archeological surveys. He remains one of the leading authorities on the prehistoric and early historic archeology of the Indian tribes who once lived in



The author sorting through bag of chert lithics from Bighorn Canyon NRA Archeological Collection. Photo by Jon Meiners, Northwest College.



Scottsbluff-like projectile point (c. 6,500 B.C.). BICA Archeological Collection.

the area. Over the past 50 years approximately 612 archeological sites have been located in the Bighorn Canyon/Pryor Mountains complex by professional and amateur archeologists. The sites excavated by Loendorf have yielded an abundance of artifacts treated and studied by the NWC internship class.

In his excavation reports, Dr. Loendorf recommended the artifacts be immediately field bagged and labeled.

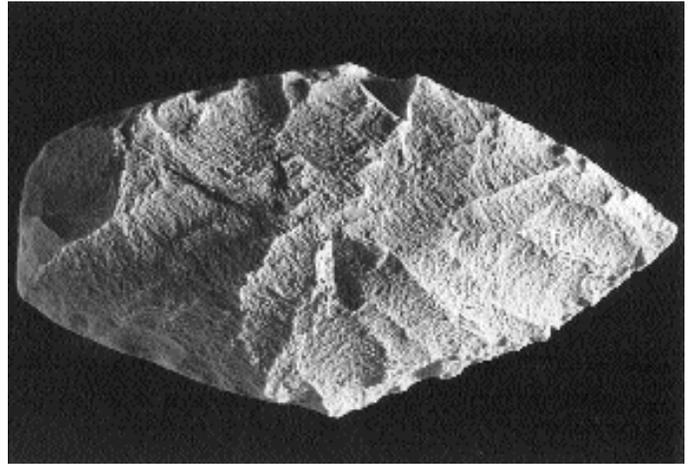
Archeological materials were initially placed in paper sacks, labeled on the outside with site provenience numbers and

placed in metal ammunition boxes for temporary storage in the Bighorn Canyon NRA Visitor Center museum storage room. There they remained for over 20 years. The bagged lithic materials were so tightly packed in the ammunition boxes some of the materials were crushed, and, in some cases, the paper bags had broken open. This is what we had to work with.

When prehistoric and historic artifacts were mentioned before the class even started, my eyes lit up with



Northwest College student Gretchen Hill studying lithic debris. Photo by Jon Meiners, Northwest College.



Small Hell Gap projectile point (c. 7,000 B.C.). BICA Archeological Collection.

dreams of perfect arrowheads, maybe some beads, and perhaps even a few grinding stones. What we got, in actuality, was tons of chert flakings, cores, and maybe a few hearth samples. Once in awhile I would come across a partial or even perfect projectile point (the correct terminology of artifacts was also learned in class). After brief congratulations by everyone in class—as if I found the point on the ground and thus a new archeological site—Jon would have us look up the origin of the point and relative dates. I discovered this is what the class was based on: **first-hand learning instead of instructor taught.** We had to do the research of the history and then tell our fellow interns about it.

The first several days of class Jon provided us with a general orientation to National Park Service museum standards and policy, the Bighorn Canyon NRA archeological surveys and collections, and the work requirements of the project. Following this, one hour lab sessions were supposed to be held every other week, but with the abundance of material (43 metal ammunition boxes crammed with lithics) and the urgency of getting the crumbling artifacts into chemically inert polyethylene bags and curatorial storage boxes, these sessions were expanded to four hours every week.

The National Park Service-Northwest College internship not only offered me curatorial insights, but a look back at the prehistory surrounding the artifacts. A gradual understanding that natural history is an integral part of cultural history as you work with the materials shaped by hands thousands of years ago. This comprehension led me to an almost critical and complete grasp of man's relationship to Bighorn Canyon. We, like people before us, are merely travelers on a continuum for survival, searching for our place in nature and history.

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*An article on the Bad Pass by Nancy Oster, also a student in the internship program, will appear in a future issue of CRM.*